

# Questions and Answers

## **Questions on Early out (VERA) and Buyout (VSIP)**

1. When can we start working with Personnel and completing all the paperwork? In addition can we complete whatever forms are needed prior to the Union's request to bargain and then submit the completed form(s) when bargaining is concluded?

You may begin the preparation of retirement forms at any time that you wish. A complete packet of information including retirement forms is available from FSA Human Resources on the ninth floor of UCP or from your regional personnel office. If you need assistance completing retirement forms or wish to discuss your situation with a retirement counselor, you may make such arrangements by calling 202-401-1920 in Washington or your regional personnel office. FSA Human Resources has arranged to have additional retirement counseling support made available beginning September 2, 2004 to support the anticipated greater demand for such support.

2. Are there any additional forms that need to be filled out or signed in addition to the normal retirement packet of forms obtained from personnel?

Yes. Those who wish to apply for a buyout must complete a buyout application in addition to either the retirement forms or a resignation form. The buyout form will be made available to all ASEDS employees upon completion of our negotiations with the union along with specific instructions on how to apply.

3. How many ASEDS employees are eligible to retire or take early outs?

There are approximately 230 employees who meet the age and length of service requirements to be eligible for voluntary or early retirement

4. How do I know if I am eligible for retirement or early retirement?

It depends on the retirement system to which you belong. There are charts that are specific to either the CSRS or FERS retirement systems. They can be found in the "2004 – 2005 Federal Retirement Handbook" (Pages 17, 25, 26) which is available at: <http://fsanet/hr/products/benefits.html> .

5. Could we get practical advice on how long the retirement process may take? How long does it take the department to pay for accrued annual leave for example?

There are two phases of retirement processing. The first occurs within the agency and begins with the submission of your fully completed retirement forms. The agency usually completes

its part of the process within one week. The second phase of the process occurs at the Office of Personnel Management and begins with their receipt of your retirement forms. Please see pages 47 - 50 of the 2004-05 Federal Retirement Guide, at:

<http://fsanet/hr/products/benefits.html> for additional information on the OPM process.

6. Is the decision to retire with a buyout irrevocable? Can someone who is 'thinking about taking the buyout/earlyout' turn their paperwork in initially - but then 'pull their paperwork back' before the final date if they change their mind? (In normal retirement, a person can 'pull their paperwork' back right up until the final day) Or is there an additional form that you have to sign that says you understand you cannot change your mind

An employee's decision to retire or resign with (or without) a buyout is completely discretionary and they can revoke their decision up to the moment that it is made effective. Obviously an employee does not receive the buyout if they do not leave.

7. Can you defer the actual departure date for the buyout/early out after January 31, 2005?

No. FSA has been authorized to offer buyouts and early out retirement only through January 31, 2005. Some required departure dates may occur before January 31, 2005 but no buyouts and early outs can occur after January 31, 2005.

We know that you have many questions about the details of how and when this early out and buyout benefit will be made available to you. The questions that we have received so far are reflected below exactly as they were asked. Unfortunately, most of the details regarding the processes for implementing our VERA/VSIP authority and the timing of those processes are subject to negotiations with the union. As soon as our negotiations are complete, we plan to share the details of those negotiations with staff.

- For those that meet the eligibility requirements to retire right now and are eligible for the first round with a buyout, can they stay until December 31st or January 31st or do they have to go no later than September 30th? What are the very last dates?
- What if there are more staff wanting to retire with an early out than the 80 buyouts allows - what is the selection criteria? Is it first come, first serve? Will more than 80 become available if there are more than 80 staff members that want to retire?
- Kay's memo says "on or about 9/30" - has thought been given to the fact that this is a Thursday, in the second week of a pay period so being off the rolls then denies staff of the annual leave and sick leave earned for that pay period?
- Kay's memo doesn't mention that buyouts and buyouts w/earlyouts are "first come - first served". First come/first served has been the rumor of how it is going to be done but since it isn't mentioned in Kay's memo, does that mean it is NOT being done first come/first served?
- If "first come, first served", how is consideration being given to staff on annual leave or sick leave or business travel? They should get the same opportunities staff in the office has.

- How are the 80 buyout-buyout/earlyout slots slotted? Only the total number is mentioned; is it 40 slots for the first phase and 40 for the second? What if all 80 are used in the first phase - is there no second phase? If a certain number of slots are in phase I but they all don't get used, do they 'slide' over to phase 2 and add to the number of phase 2 slots?
- Now that the union wants to bargain on buyouts /early outs will the dates for the offers to conclude as given in Kay's memo to conclude as given in the memo of 08/24 change?
- Some staff who are eligible to retire (so they only need the buyout, not the earlyout) interpret the way Kay's memo was written to mean that they have the option of going out yet this fiscal year by 9/30 or waiting for the buyout that will again be offered in October. Are they interpreting that correctly?
- What is the beginning date for Phase I - Sept. 1?
- In Kay's memo, the wording of Phase II is confusing - it says there will be a buyout and an early out offered but it doesn't say those 2 things would be combined as a buyout w/earlyout. Is the combination of buyout with an earlyout NO longer an option?
- When is some more specific, instead of such generic, information going to be available? Kay's memo mentions a 'separate memo' to each employee - when is that coming?
- If the 80 slots for buyout are not all used, will the buyout be offered to those who apply for early out?
- Is there anyway a buyout can be extended for employee separation from Federal services until January 2, 2005?

## **Questions on Reorganization**

8. Does this mean the "quiet period" is over, and managers can at least discuss conceptual issues (since some details still remain to be worked out) with the staff?

Managers will be able to discuss all implementation details once the reorganization is made effective on September 19, 2004.

9. There are several things I'd like to know about the criteria used to place the employees in the School Relations Branch ("CAMs"). I understand that there were criteria used above and beyond what is on the position description (which would make sense, because we all have the same PD). How were people mapped in the new reorganization?

Employees in the School Relations Branch were generally reassigned to positions that matched their primary job responsibilities. In some cases there were no positions that matched an employee's primary job responsibilities available, so we identified them for reassignment to positions that matched either a secondary or lesser job responsibility or a position that needed to be filled because of a pressing business need. In all instances, employees were identified for reassignment to positions that matched their promotion potential and would NOT require that they relocate to a different geographic location.